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FEATURES

St. Aubin Street Massacre: 1929 Detroit family murders still unsolved

July 3, 1929: Family of 6 murdered with axe in Detroit home

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FAMILY OF SIX HACKED TO DEATH

Detroit Italian Couple and Four Children Victims of Ax Murder

Girls' School Gives Air S

LA Times/Associated Press

DETROIT – It's one of the most brutal murders in Detroit's history, and after more than 90 years it still remains unsolved.

On the night of July 3, 1929, Benny Evangelist, and his wife and four children were found brutally murdered in their Detroit home, on **St. Aubin and Mack.**

The killings were carried out with an axe. Evangelist's wife and children were killed while they slept in their beds.

Evangelist was found nearly decapitated at his desk.

Over the many decades since, there have been several theories as to why someone would murder this family.

Who was Benny Evangelist?

Hailed as a "mystic" and "healer," Evangelist was the leader of a so-called cult, who received as much as $10 per "reading," using unorthodox methods to heal both the mentally and physically challenged.

His methods ranged from religion, black magic to prescribing herbal medicine.

Two years after arriving in the U.S., in 1904, Evangelist, an Italian immigrant, claims to have began receiving visions from God.

He published a four-volume "bible" he called "The Oldest History of the World: Discovered by Occult Science," self-describing himself as a prophet.

In his basement, Evangelist constructed an odd spiritual sanctuary consisting of **wax dolls and figures** hung by wires from the ceiling depicting "celestial planets." The basement served as the "church" for Evangelist's sermons.

He referred to his bible as "the sun."

Evangelist had amounted several enemies, mostly those who believed they were being ripped off. Some

Evangelist family murdered July 3

The night before the murders took place, **Evangelist had made a call** to the watchman of a house that was being demolished.

He told the watchman that he had purchased all of the salvageable lumber from the wreck, and would arrange for the wood to be picked up and delivered to his home.

The plan was that Evangelist would meet the truck the next morning to pay the deliverymen.

Evangelist and his family were murdered later that night, but the deliverymen were a no-show.

Evangelist had planned to have the money to pay them the following day, yet no cash was found in the home following the murder.

ALSO READ: When the 'Purple Gang' ruled Detroit

Police were never able to locate the name of the delivery company, but suspected money to be a motive.

According to an article posted on July 3 by **The United Press**, Evangelist's head had been completely severed from his body and was on a chair near the bed in which his and his wife's bodies were found.

Benny, 43, his wife, Santina, 36, their four children, Angeline, 8, Matilda, 5, Jay, 3 and their 18-month-old son, Morrio, were discovered by a neighbor.

Here's the story from The **Associated Press on July 3, 1929**:

"Sitting before his desk, which also served as an altar, his hands folded as though in prayer, the body of Benny Evangelist, mystic healer and religious fanatic, was found shortly before noon on Wednesday. The head lay on the floor beside the chair. The bodies of his wife and four children found upstairs, their skulls crushed. Police are working on the theory that Evangelist was the victim of a second religious fanatic, It is believed the slayings took place about midnight."

Wayne County coroner James Burgess commented in the **paper** the following morning:

"This is the most unusual case. A single perverted maniac must have killed them, although it seems impossible that some of their screams would not be heard."

A funeral was held on July 6. A crowd of about 3,000 curious residents packed the streets.

excited suspicion, but was released shortly after.

The search for the killer

On July 4, every police squad in Detroit was ordered to join in a city-wide search for the killer.

Police initially investigated a connection to a murder of a mother and her three children two weeks prior, but the connection was not valid.

No trace of a weapon was found in the home. Police did find bloody fingerprints on the door latch. There was a **reward of $1,000 being offered** by Detroit police for information.

Angelo Depoli was arrested the day of the murder with a blood covered knife, but police couldn't connect him to the family, despite neighbors claiming he was a frequent visitor at the home.

In March 1930, the AP published a report with the headline "Eye Witness to Brutal Detroit Axe Slaying Finally Turns Up."

The eye witness was a dog. Here's what the **report read:**

"The witness is a shaggy brown mongrel dog, which belonged to the children of Benny Evangelist. The animal disappeared at the time Evangelist and his wife and the four children were hacked to death on July 3, 1929. In the course of routine a record was made of the dog's license number, but the dog was not found. Yesterday, a woman reported that a dog with a 1929 license number had come to her home. When she learned who had owned the animal she decided not to adopt it."

Three years after the gruesome murders, a man nicknamed the "rear axle murderer," **Robert Harris confessed**. Police believed they had solved the crime. But after investigating his claims, they found Harris was lying.

There have been leads from time to time, but the case has remained ice cold.

The legend of St. Aubin Street

Many say the land where the family lived, near the corner of St. Aubin and Mack, **is haunted.**

There have been reports of a headless man seen wandering around, along with disembodied voices and screams.

A book titled **"Detroit Occult Murders"** details a string of murders between 1929 and 1931 all centered around St. Aubin Street.

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BO **Bonnie** OCTOBER 4, 2021

So the deliverymen/man showed up the night before, slaughtered the family, took the cash and sold the lumber for more cash

REPLY 0 0

ST **Stargazer** JULY 19, 2021

No wonder we can't solve more present day crimes. Seems like we're a little behind.

REPLY 1 REPLY 1 0

BO **Bonnie** OCTOBER 4, 2021

Reply to **Stargazer**

Add your reply

DP

Deek Pokecheck JULY 19, 2021

Thanks for posting this forgotten bit of Detroit history. Went online and found many news photos showing what Benny and his family looked like along with a photo of his home in what was then a typical Detroit family neighborhood. Benny had some weird paper Mache objects hanging in his basement, but neither he or his wife looked like anything special, except that in none of the photos was either one smiling. Thanks again for the story!

REPLY 2 REPLIES 2 0

1 **SHOW OLDER REPLIES**

BO

Bonnie OCTOBER 4, 2021

Reply to **Deek Pokecheck**

In his basement, Evangelist constructed an odd spiritual sanctuary consisting of wax dolls and figures hung by wires from the ceiling depicting "celestial planets."

REPLY 1 0

Add your reply

SR

Steve Robinson JULY 19, 2021

Sure that headless man wasn't just a homeless guy living in the dumpster in the back alley drunk off his butt muttering some jingles??

No sense wasting resources trying to solve this one, pretty sure those responsible are no longer alive.

EDITED

REPLY 2 REPLIES 1 1

PH

Paul Hausser JULY 19, 2021

Reply to **Steve Robinson**

You must be a WCPO employee with that attitude.

REPLY 1 REPLY 0 1

SR

Steve Robinson JULY 19, 2021

Reply to **Paul Hausser**

No just a retired nobody living the dream obviously with too much time on my hands since on this site. Lol EDITED

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